

# DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE  
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY  
AT HOME & ABROAD



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May MCMXXVIII

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# DRAMA

VOL. VI

MAY MCMXXVIII

NUMBER 8

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

## PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By Hubert Griffith

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THE plays of the last few weeks may roughly be divided up into those that survived the smashing effect of the Ibsen centenary performances of a month ago, and those which did not.

The Ibsen revivals were sometimes sketchy and sometimes inadequately rehearsed, but they did what they set out to do. They convinced a large number of the new generation (who might otherwise have had doubts about it) that it has to be an extraordinarily good modern play to be worthy to hold a candle to the works of the great Norwegian master. Genius has nothing whatever to do with "date."

As if expressly to prove that "date" has a great deal to do with all lesser works of art, and that a play may be thirty years out of date before it begins to be written, there were two or three plays produced in the West End that had no place in the present century. "Mr. Priestley's Night Out" was a farce of the old order of farces, that lasted not more than three or four nights at the Royalty. "The Stranger in the House" was a serious and improbable domestic drama at Wyndham's. "Other Men's Wives," with Miss Fay Compton at the St. Martin's, has all the stock situations of pyjamas, hotel bedrooms, stolen necklaces and comic detectives, that have figured in farces as far as the memory of living man goes back. Thirty years ago they were unreservedly popular. But their throne is nowadays less secure. We make progress.

In opposition to them there has been at least one first-rate play, judged by any standard or any date, and two or three

other remarkable entertainments, widely varied in character, all of which will have deserved whatever success they get.

The first-rate play is "Thunder in the Air," a war drama, written by a new author, of ten years after the war. It deals with the war's ghosts—the spirits who return ten years later, and the effect they can still have on the life that they have left. The writer is bold enough actually to bring such a spirit on to the stage, a uniformed and muddled and bandaged subaltern, to stand between the girl whom he loved and the man who is now about to marry her. Incredible? Impossible? At least, unconvincing and inclined to bathos? Not a bit. The play is sincerely and powerfully moving, and, in spite of a lapse and a weakness in the last act, is eminently the play of the month to see.

There is little else to rival it in the way of serious drama, but two of the lighter entertainments are outstandingly successful and seem to have made brilliance popular. One of them is Mr. Noel Coward's revue, "This Year of Grace," at the Pavilion; the other is that rare thing, a farce founded on probability and character, "The Baby Cyclone" at the Lyric.

Tennyson's "Harold" is, I am told, a play to see, though I did not see it, being involved on the night of its production with the production of the dramatized version of that remarkable work, "Gentleman Prefer Blondes." The book had genius. It was a best-seller, but it was also the shrewdest and most amusing piece of satire in many years. About ten per cent. of its real quality comes across the footlights in the



## PLAYS OF THE MONTH

stage production, but that ten per cent., coupled with some new and original coruscations on the part of the celebrated Dorothy, make it still worth having.

The Stage Society earned our gratitude by doing "The Dictator," a serious and interesting political play by the author of

"Docteur Knock," and the Arts Theatre had a great evening with Mr. George Moore's "The Making of an Immortal." Mr. George Moore cannot write "a play" in the accepted critic's sense. Perhaps he is lucky. It does not debar him from being amusing.

## A NOTE ON POETIC DRAMA

By A. G. Berrisford

WITH Sir Barry Jackson's production of "Harold," at the Court Theatre, the problem of poetic drama is again revived. Despite its failure to secure a permanence as a dramatic form, constant efforts are made to establish it on some kind of footing. It is a chimera of fascination inexhaustible. And the reason is patent. The stage has always lured to itself writers whose gifts are not at all "stagey" or even dramatic. Many authors have entertained hopes of writing a play: many authors have actually made the attempt. But an ability to write good novels is not, in itself, an ability to write good plays, for drama is an art, separate unto itself, and not a form of literary expression. This is a position which many authors of repute have failed to understand; hence their earnest endeavour to write plays which should be marked above all by good writing—by giving them a literary flavour designed to raise drama from the common popular level to one higher and better.

This was the attitude of the nineteenth-century writers, especially of the early decades. Then, drama was sharply divided between the popular and literary types. The general level of plays performed in London during the years from 1790 onwards was amazingly low, even more so than it is to-day. Elaborate operas, artificial and false, were to be found alongside of rude farces where wit was ousted by horseplay and vulgarity. The better plays were stiff and dreary, heavy tragedies or moral comedies. There were, too, the melodramas gorgeously produced, but lacking depth and sincerity. Mere outside brilliance which was greatly appreciated by the satisfied audiences. It was here that the German

influence first showed itself, especially in the exploitation of weak sentimentalism and false ultra-theatrical themes. Sheridan Knowles is the best known—or least forgotten—of the dramatists of this time, and his work may be taken as representative of the best of contemporary popular drama.

But at the other end of the scale were the long wordy plays written with earnest conviction by the poets of the day. Strangely enough, the novelists seem never to have attempted drama—which is interesting. For on a first glance it would appear that they were far more likely to achieve success in the theatre than were the poets, in as much as their work relied so much more upon invention, plot, quick moving narrative, and the like. But novel-writing was enjoying a greater vogue and its results were considerably more lucrative. The main efforts in the sphere of drama, then, were those of the poets. And they wrote in ignorance of the stage. Wordsworth, who seldom visited a theatre, wrote "The Borderers." Shelley wrote "The Cenci"—the best known of these poetic dramas. Keats gave us "Otho the Great." Coleridge, "Remorse" and translations from Schiller. Byron wrote magnificent dramatic poems, the best being "Cain," "Werther," and "Manfred." Charles Wells ("Joseph and his Brethren"), Landor ("Count Julian") and Beddoes ("Death's Jestbook"—exceptionally interesting this) were followed by Browning and Tennyson, whose plays are better remembered than these others.

But these efforts were unsuccessful. They were conceived with a motive: to transfer dignity of language to the stage, where the dialogue was false and barbaric. Take

## A NOTE ON POETIC DRAMA

"Sweeney Todd" or "Maria Marten": here the style of writing constitutes for our present-day audiences the chief element of the fun. So it came about that the poets wanted to dignify the English stage, raise it to the glory of the Elizabethan, when action and language were blended harmoniously. Unfortunately for their ambitions (most worthy in themselves) though they possessed literary excellence they lacked a dramatic sense. They were thus prevented from seeing that even their language was totally unfit for speech upon the stage. They confused literature with drama. And so to us, sometimes forgetting their sincere ideals, these poet-dramatists often appear to be using the theatre as an excuse for long rhetorical speeches. Furthermore, they used old themes in an old way. They were obsessed with Shakespeare-worship and Elizabethan technique. They brought nothing new to drama, merely the rehashings of the seventeenth-century commonplace. They lacked sprightliness, they lacked a sense of humour. (Charles Lamb was one of the few men of the time who had it. And of his plays the least said the better.) With lumbering seriousness they constructed their quasi-Elizabethan plays which often reek of Shakespeare even to the verbal cadences, the images, and the blank verse rhythms. But several of the plays were actually produced, when the sumptuousness of the settings and the bravado of the acting helped to hide the emptiness of theme and weakness of structure. Macready presented "Stratford." Irving gave Tennyson's plays a further lease of life.

But when all is said and done, this poetic drama of the nineteenth century has failed. The problem, however, remains. And attempts are still made to achieve success in this type of play. Flecker's "Hassan" caused a stir a few years ago. Laurence Housman, John Masefield, Laurence Binyon, Lascelles Abercrombie, John Drinkwater, Gordon Bottomley—writers of to-day are yet persevering. Whether poetic drama can ever be successful in the fullest sense of the word is difficult to say. For my own part I feel that it cannot. The great play demands dialogue taut and concise, situa-

tions of suspense, emotions of universal application. The spirit of poetry cannot avoid showing itself in the great play. But poetry as a literary form cannot be its medium, since the emotions of poetry are too introspective, its interest too personal, and its diction too full and glamorous.

## FRENCH AMATEURS

AMATEUR activities in the theatre are far from being so earnestly organized in France as in England. Not that the French people are not keen to seek artistic emotions through the medium of drama: as a matter of fact, there is no town that does not witness at least one dramatic production in the course of a winter season—but these productions are mostly the work of public schools or of religious bodies—in which case the productions often aim at political propaganda (since in France Roman Catholics are apt to mix up politics and religion). On the whole, the grown-up Frenchman has not yet realized the educational value of the drama; while, on the other hand, in this strongly centralized country, perhaps through the influence of the Comédie Française and the Paris theatre, the public has been rendered "*difficile*" as to what acting should be.

The traveller in France, however, will, as likely as not, be faced unexpectedly with the activities of a University. For instance, the students in Poitiers have built up an artistic section, called "le Studio," which has proved very vigorous, and besides helping local societies, produces a new play of high literary value each month. On December 20, 1926, a play by Charles Vildrac, one of the best modern French dramatists, "*le Paquebot Tenacity*," was given at the Municipal Theatre. It was followed, on January 25, 1927, by "*la Danse de la Mort*," and on February 25, by "*Bonbouroche*," a comedy by Courteline. In March, the Ciné Castille was hired for the production of three plays: "*Jacqueline*," "*L'appel du Clown*," "*La Grande Pénitence*."

RAVIEL LECLERIQ

# THE MYSTERY PLAY AT CANTERBURY

By the Very Rev. G. K. A. Bell, D.D., Dean of Canterbury

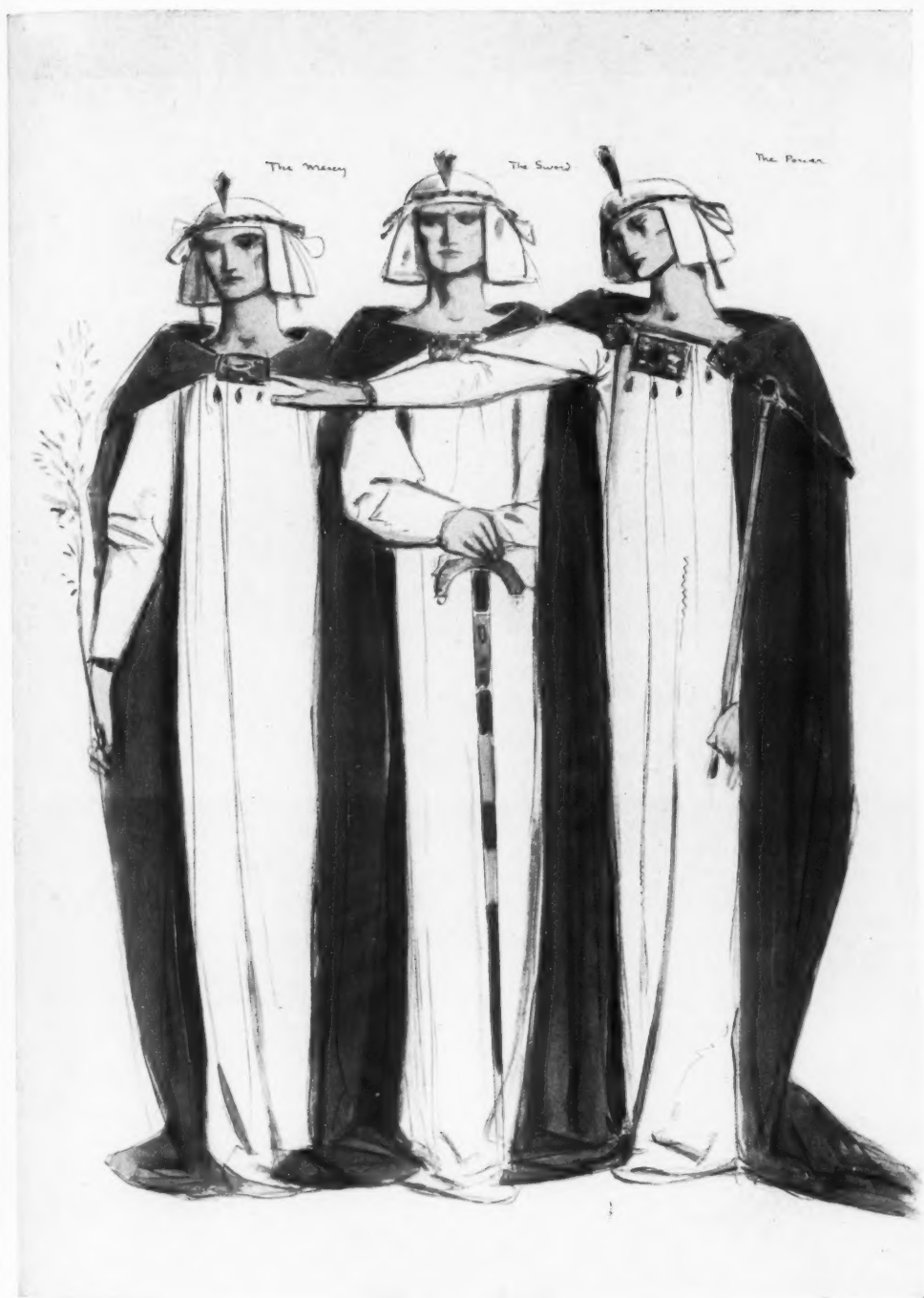
**A**T Whitsuntide a poetical play, "The Coming of Christ," by John Masefield is to be produced in Canterbury Cathedral. It has been specially written for the cathedral, and will be performed at the east end of the nave, with the choir screen as its background, and the stone platforms between the different tiers of steps as its stage. It deals with the central truth of the Christian religion, and deals with it as revelation, a fact made emphatically clear in the action of the Prologue which sets the motive of the play before the audience. Although the work consists in the main of spoken dialogue, there is a certain amount of incidental music, including songs by two choruses, "The Heavenly Host," and "The King's Attendants." This has been composed by Gustav Holst. There is no scenery in the ordinary sense of the word—for what could the eye desire more beautiful than the cathedral itself—but the dresses and various accessories have been designed by Charles Ricketts, who will be associated with Mr. Masefield in the production of the play. The Canterbury School of Art is at work on several of the accessories, and Canterbury needlewomen are making most of the costumes. The principal chorus, "The Heavenly Host" is being trained by Mr. Holst. But nearly all the actors and the chorus of the "King's Attendants" are Canterbury residents, drawn from the cathedral choir, local choral and other societies and various groups. The second chorus will be trained by Dr. Palmer, the cathedral organist. The play will be acted four times, in the late afternoon and evening of Monday, May 28, and Tuesday, May 29. It will last probably from an hour to an hour and a half. Admission to

all seats will be free; and it is hoped that the gifts of the audience at the time will be sufficiently generous to meet the expenses. A limited number of reserved seats will be available (free of charge) on written application (with stamped addressed envelope) after May 12 to the Play Secretary, The Deanery, Canterbury.

This brief description will show that the writing, as also the presentation of "The Coming of Christ," is an important event. It is certainly, as I believe, an incident of great significance in the history of Canterbury Cathedral. I look upon it as a religious event, an act of religious dedication and inspiration, very proper for the Whitsuntide Festival. Here is an offering of gifts—poetry, music, beauty of colour and design, singing and acting, arts and crafts. Here also is the presentation of great religious truth to man's imagination and senses in a glorious form. The nave of a cathedral has always been regarded as a place where it is natural to use a greater freedom than is possible in the choir. Those who know the Canterbury nave, with its rising flights of steps at the east end would hardly wish for a more beautiful setting for a noble and lovely play.

In old days, in Canterbury and elsewhere, poetry and religion were closely associated; and in particular Drama meant much to the Church, and the Church to Drama. It is healthy for both, as well as for the general good, that such an association should be revived. There are many instances of such a revival already. I rejoice that, thanks to the poet, the musician and the artist, as well as to the help and sympathy of many others, Canterbury Cathedral is to do its part with "The Coming of Christ."





"THE THREE POWERS" FROM THE DESIGN BY CHARLES RICKETTS, A.R.A. FOR "THE COMING OF CHRIST"  
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## DRAMA IN NEW ORLEANS

IN 1790 New Orleans gave opera its first comfortably lined nest in this country. Somewhat later it shared with New York the honour of housing the best drama of the United States. In the nineteenth century New York became the dramatic Mecca, but the Creole city was still important to the professional stage because of its warm reception of eastern successes usually the same year they were made in New York. In this twentieth century, however, although New Orleans has come within a day and a half of New York commercially, by airplane, it has been thrust two or three years away dramatically, largely because of the collapse of the whole road show structure. The southern city is out of the touring path for the few travelling companies that are worth while. It cannot have current productions of merit by first-class companies at all, and by second-class troupes only after Sublet, Illinois, and Nudivision, California, have ogled the worn costumes and heard the tired voices. Here then, professionally, is an isolated and neglected dramatic field, yet potentially one of the richest for the stage in America. It has atmosphere, background, culture and Latin temperament that is so susceptible to drama.

There is, in view of the present professional theatrical debacle outside of New York, but one solution for New Orleans: namely, to supply its own players and produce its own plays. In 1916 a few aggressive and dramatically starved persons did this by forming a very limited organization called The Drawing-room Players. As the name implies they produced plays in the drawing-rooms of private houses. By 1919 the demand of outsiders to be given a chance to partake in the fun had resulted in a reorganization known as Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre, and in the leasing of rooms which were deftly transformed into a little playhouse. By 1922 the leased rooms were too small, and a site of adequate size was purchased and invested gradually with buildings and equipment.

To-day Le Petit Theatre owns a picturesque group of buildings surrounding a little gem of a *patio*; it has 3,500 sustaining members, and is financially independent and artistically free to do as it chooses. So well recognized has been its worth to New Orleans that a few years ago its perennial president, Mrs. James Oscar Nixon, was presented with a loving cup by one of the newspapers for having accomplished the most noteworthy civic achievement of any citizen.

Although the founders of Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre were cognizant of the birth and growth of the Little Theatre movement in America, they were not actuated by it in creating and carrying on their own undertaking. The origin was independent, and although the development was paralleled to that of the Little Theatre and was stimulated by the latter toward a broad field of experiment, the first years in New Orleans were passed simply in filling the need of better plays than otherwise could be seen in the city. At first the entire activity was amateur, later a professional director was engaged to coach the players, and in the course of events a small staff was added. The first plays were one-act, and then, as paraphernalia and talent were acquired, full-length productions were staged. Along with these developments came the encouragement of local playwrights to dramatize the life of the locality. Each year a play by a local writer has been produced.

It was not until this present year that Le Petit Theatre developed to a point where its leaders were willing to adopt a programme more expansive than formerly. This programme has differed from that of other years in its provisions for more elaborately staged productions than heretofore, under the guidance of a professional director of acknowledged repute; and for a clearly defined attempt to seek out and train more players in the organization by engaging an assistant director for the purpose. To aid in promoting these aims the latest equipment which could be found, adaptable for the

## DRAMA IN NEW ORLEANS

stage of Le Petit Theatre, was purchased.

The man chosen as director was Walter Sinclair, who first gained his experience as the conductor of the Amateur Dramatic Club of Hong-Kong, China, during the years 1912-22. His success in the Orient excited the more interest and respect because his work was but the leisure of an active business career. This reputation brought him an offer from Hart House, in Toronto, where he directed two of the most successful seasons that unique Little Theatre has ever known.

Mr. Sinclair became noted particularly for his settings and has carried on this depart-

ment of stage craft during his first productions in Le Petit Theatre more elaborately than was ever done there before. It is Mr. Sinclair's contention that as far as possible it should be the chief aim of a little theatre to foster worth-while plays that cannot find production on the commercial stage. Consonant with this idea, the first three productions of the current season were "The Mask and The Face" by Luigi Chiarelli (adapted and translated by C. B. Fernald); "John Ferguson" by St. John Ervine, and the Christmas fantasy "The Rose and The Ring" by Thackeray. Other productions will be of equal merit.

## STAGE DIRECTIONS

By C. M. Bowen

THE comparative scarcity of stage directions in Shakespeare's plays has usually been attributed to the fact that they were first produced under the personal direction of the author, who could therefore give his instructions to the actors by word of mouth. Modern dramatists, who are not always in that happy position, and whose plays are frequently published in book form before they are produced, are in the habit of writing elaborate stage directions, both for the guidance of the producer and for the benefit of readers, who are thus enabled to visualize the scene.

It may be questioned, however, whether this practice has not been carried too far. It is true that the requirements of the modern realistic theatre demand from the dramatist more exactness than was expected from the Elizabethan, with his bare stage and vaguely localized scenes; though, as a matter of fact, Shakespeare, sparing as he is of directions, does frequently indicate not only the scene, but also the stage "business," in the course of the dialogue. Instead of saying "Scene: The Forest of Arden," he makes the Duke say "Are not these woods more free from peril than the envious court?" If any of the characters have to shake hands, to shed tears, to cover their faces, or to make any other significant move-

ment or gesture, we get in the dialogue such lines as "Let each man render me his bloody hand"; "Have you wept all this while?" "Ne'er pull your hat upon your brows" and so on; at which, it may be assumed, the players suited the action to the word.

But the modern dramatist apparently gives the actor credit for less intelligence, and thinks it necessary to dictate to him every detail of his down-sitting and his uprising. The following passage from Mr. St. John Ervine's play "The Ship," seems to me a good example of this:

Cornelius (*pouring out the whisky*):  
Say when, Sir!

John (*when enough has been poured out*):  
Thanks!

As if any actor, but for this direction, would be likely to say "Thanks!" before any whisky had been poured out, or, on the other hand, to wait till the glass was running over before he said it!

A certain amount of stage direction is of course necessary. The dramatist must make it clear where his action is to take place, and he often desires, in addition, to convey by the setting an impression of what may be called the emotional tone of the scene. For instance, the furnishing of a room may at once suggest to the audience that its owner is rich, poor, vulgar,

## STAGE DIRECTIONS

artistic, slovenly, or any one of various other things. In such cases it would, however, generally be sufficient for the dramatist to state in the stage directions that this impression is to be conveyed, and to leave the scenic designer to use his own judgment about the means necessary to produce it.

Another legitimate kind of stage direction is that which indicates the tone or manner in which certain lines are to be said. The same words will give a totally different impression according as they are spoken seriously or lightly, with a smile, or a sneer, or a break in the voice. Mr. Bernard Shaw has left it on record that the whole point of his play, "The Devil's Disciple," was missed, and its meaning distorted, when it was first produced during his absence abroad. The dramatist, it appears, had omitted to state explicitly (thinking it was made sufficiently clear in the text) that Richard Dudgeon was not in love with Judith Anderson, and the actor had played it as if he were.

It is not often that Mr. Shaw's stage directions err on the side of scantiness; but, copious as they generally are, they are at any rate confined to things which can be conveyed to the audience either by the stage setting, or by the tone or expression of the actors. In other words, they are essentially dramatic; whereas descriptions of the past life of the characters, or of complicated thoughts which are supposed to be passing through their minds, certainly are not.

"Is there a special manner of a man whose wife died ten years ago?" says Isobel to Royce in "The Truth about Blayds." The characters in the play at once recognize this to be ludicrous; but it is no more than some modern dramatists expect the unfortunate actor to convey, without a line of dialogue in which to do it. Sir James Barrie is incorrigible in this respect. His plays are full of narrative passages, delightful to read, but more suitable to a novel than a play. In "A Kiss for Cinderella" Mr. Bodie is so much struck by Cinderella's theory about the Venus de Milo that (in the words of the stage direction) "he contemplates a letter to *The Times*." When the play was produced, if I remember rightly, the actor

ejaculated "By Jove! I must write to *The Times* about it!" or words to that effect. It is difficult to see how he could possibly have conveyed the idea in any other way; but, that being so, why did not the dramatist write the line as part of the dialogue?

The late Mr. William Archer was fond of praising the modern dramatist at the expense of the Elizabethan on the ground that he had a much more difficult task; forbidden such easy devices as the soliloquy and the "aside," he had to convey all necessary information in the dialogue in a convincing and realistic manner. But perhaps Mr. Archer exaggerated his difficulties, or did not realize that he had discovered a way of evading them. The Greek dramatist had his chorus, by which he could convey to the audience what had happened before the beginning of the play; the Elizabethan had his prologue and his soliloquies. The modern dramatist dispenses with these devices, because he does not need them; he has discovered the almost unlimited possibilities of stage directions.

## A NOTE FROM STOCKHOLM

An interesting and so far unique representation of "The School for Scandal," by Sheridan, is now being played in the Oscar Theatre of Stockholm. The stage, all the decorations and costumes are authentic eighteenth century, being borrowed from the rich theatrical collections of the Royal Theatre Museum at Drottningholm, outside Stockholm. The detailed directions of the original stage directors of this play are strictly observed, and the stage is copied after one in the old Drottningholm Theatre, built in 1764-1766.

The Drottningholm Theatre Museum contains the finest collection in the world of theatrical manuscripts, music, stage directions, decorations, costumes and stage models, dating from the sixteenth century down to the beginning of the nineteenth and representing the early dramatic art of the whole of western and southern Europe. Thus, it contains a series of rare Italian and French stage properties from 1500-1700; a model of the theatre in Parma in 1620; a reconstruction of a court ballet in about 1650; a French "inferno" scene from the latter half of the seventeenth century; and a tragedy stage, created by Bérain and tried at the Hotel Bourgogne Theatre in Paris before its being shipped to Charles XII of Sweden. The sketches of the decorations here, mostly French and from the time of Louis XIV, are said to be unparalleled in stage-land history.



## BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



### THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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TWO legal cases of considerable interest to members of the British Drama League have been heard during the past month. The case of Citizen House, Bath, in which Miss Consuelo de Reyes was fined £10 and costs for the performance of a play in her private theatre has, naturally, excited a good deal of feeling. The decision of the Bath magistrates is held to imperil the position of many organizations who are in the habit of producing plays in unlicensed buildings. These productions are almost always of an educational or social character, and a long-established tradition has allowed them to be regarded as outside the scope of the Theatres Act of 1843. The case of the Gate Theatre, London, is that of an organization working on somewhat different lines from those obtaining at Citizen House. But the legal issues are very similar, although in the former case payment for tickets is obligatory, whereas at Citizen House entry is free by invitation, the expenses being to some extent met by a collection at the doors. In our view it

is unlikely that we shall witness any violent outbreak of repressive measures in other localities; but we welcome Miss de Reyes' decision to appeal to a higher court. The recent growth in the number of unlicensed theatrical performances was bound sooner or later to attract the notice of the authorities, and elucidation is needed of a state of things which is admittedly ambiguous. The British Drama League and the interests it represents must bring all resources to bear, so that such movements as those represented by Citizen House and the Gate Theatre shall find their normal development safeguarded, and, if necessary, legalized. No one desires that assemblies of persons in conditions likely to endanger life or limb should be permitted under the technical plea that such assemblies are private and not public. But it is absurd that Little Theatre performances on a small scale should be hampered by the same regulations which obtain in the case of performances which attract audiences of hundreds or even thousands of the general public.

The Drama League had the honour of paying a farewell tribute to Miss Sybil Thorndike and Mr. Lewis Casson, by a public dinner at the Mayfair Hotel on Sunday evening, April 15. Miss Thorndike delivered a speech which will long be remembered by all who heard it. Other speakers included Lady Bell, Miss Lilian Braithwaite, Mr. Ben Greet, Mr. St. John Ervine and Mr. Lewis Casson. We were particularly glad that Lord Gorell accepted the League's invitation to preside at the dinner, thereby proving his interest in our work and in the work of the theatre generally.

We have entered into a contract with Messrs. B. Roberts and Co., of Newport House, Great Newport Street, W.C., by which they will control the advertisement pages and advertising rights in *DRAMA* as from the next (June) issue of the magazine. All communications from those wishing to advertise in the journal should therefore be made to Messrs. Roberts at the above address and not to the British Drama League.

# RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

"Shakespeare and the Theatre." By Members of the Shakespeare Association. Oxford University Press. 15s.

"A Study of Hamlet." By Cumberland Clark. Blackwell. 4s. 6d.

"Scenery in Shakespeare's Plays." By David Watson Rannie. Blackwell. 10s. 6d.

"Physical Conditions of the Elizabethan Playhouse." By William J. Lawrence. "Pre-Restoration Stage Studies." By William J. Lawrence. Harvard and Oxford. 7s. 6d. and 28s.

"Tragedy." By F. L. Lucas. Hogarth Press. 3s. 6d. each.

EVER since I heard that the Shakespeare Association was to publish a collection of papers on "Shakespeare and the Theatre" I had been eagerly looking forward to the book. I suppose it was really rather ingenious of me, but I actually expected that the essays would be packed with discussions on the merits of recent and very varying methods of producing Shakespeare, such as, for instance, those at the Kingsway, the Maddermarket, and the Old Vic. Here at last, I imagined, would be quiet and considered judgments on the work of the outstanding Shakespearean producers, actors, and designers of to-day. But, as I have admitted, it was really rather ingenious of me, and when I opened the book I found that it began with an essay on Edward Alleyn and finished with "Some Early records Illustrating the Personal Life of Shakespeare." There were certainly some essays in between on subjects such as Shakespeare's stagecraft, his actors, his stage, and his audience, but although the writers had a great deal to say about the Globe and the Curtain, they had apparently never been inside the Kingsway or the Maddermarket. I hasten to make it quite clear that all the essays in this volume are extremely good of their kind, but I feel very strongly that nobody should attempt to criticize the theatrecraft of any dramatist, alive or dead, unless he is able to discuss actual performances of the plays at which he has himself been present. I am not complaining against the critics who concentrate on the poetry and psychology in Shakespeare's plays, or on the way he reflects the life of his times. I have a whole shelf of such books which have given me an enormous amount of pleasure. But I do maintain that as soon as critics start to write about Shakespeare as a dramatist and a man of the theatre, it is absolutely essential that they should take recent productions of his plays into consideration. The real value of scholarly work and discussion on this subject must ultimately be judged by its influence on modern productions of the plays. Essays which ignore this end are apt to be mere academic tittle-tattle.

Mr. Cumberland Clark's study of Hamlet is another example of the reluctance of many Shakespearean critics to admit that they have ever been inside a theatre. Mr. Clark gets the length of devoting an entire chapter to modern productions of Hamlet, and so far as it goes it is intensely interesting and useful. But he ends with Sir

Johnston Forbes-Robertson, and carefully avoids any reference to more recent performances. I am beginning to wonder if there is some unwritten law among Shakespearean critics, broken only by the boldest among them, which decrees that it is bad form to make the solution of some knotty problem easier by going to see the plays acted. For instance, one of the writers of this batch of criticisms is very worried as to whether it was really possible for the Elizabethan actors to get through the plays in the short time in which they are traditionally supposed to have been performed, but if this writer had troubled to go to the Maddermarket he would have had all his doubts set at rest by actually seeing a play performed there practically uncut within something very near the time taken by the Elizabethan performances.

Apart from the chapter I have already mentioned, I found Mr. Clark's book heavy reading, as he writes of his subject with a most oppressively solemn air of awe and reverence, handling the most battered platitudes of Shakespearean criticism as if they were infinitely fragile and precious. It was a relief to turn to Mr. Rannie's pleasant essay on the scenery in Shakespeare's plays—not stage scenery in the accepted sense of the word, but the scenery which the characters are continually painting for us in their speeches.

Mr. Lawrence's two books deal entirely with facts. They make no pretence at criticism, so there is no need to quarrel with them for ignoring the modern stage. The smaller book consists mainly of a minute analysis of stage directions in old plays with a view to clearing up some of the problems of Shakespearean stagecraft. It is an extremely valuable book for giving a clear and accurate impression of the Elizabethan playhouse, and much of it is of real use to anybody seriously producing Shakespearean plays. "Pre-Restoration Stage Studies" is a similar book on a more elaborate scale. I was, frankly, prepared to be rather bored by it, but it soon engrossed me completely. I cannot imagine anybody who has anything of the theatre in their bones failing to revel in the gossip provided by such chapters as those on the early prompt books, the practice of doubling, Elizabethan producing, noises off, stage properties, and so on. It is far and away the most readable book on the subject I have met with.

Mr. Lucas's examination of Aristotle is immensely exhilarating. He lays about him with tremendous zest. With a crash down go ideas we had always sleepily and comfortably taken for granted. He interprets Aristotle in an essentially modern spirit, in the spirit of an age that has at last frankly admitted that pleasure is the end of art. He has no use for the conventional interpretation of the purgation theory. "The theatre is not a hospital . . . we go to tragedies not in the least to get rid of emotions, but to have them more abundantly; to banquet, not to purge." His indignation sweeps one along, and with him one's mind revolts with sudden anger "at the thought of the besetting meanness of philosophers, who can seldom be disinterested, who make

## RECENT BOOKS

life a reformatory, and beauty useful, and art a pill." I repeat that it is an exhilarating book, an exciting book, and an extremely scholarly book in spite of its vigorously athletic style.

- "Three Plays with a Preface." By Noel Coward. Secker. 7s. 6d.
- "Four One-Act Plays." By St. John Ervine. Allen and Unwin. 3s. 6d.
- "The Treasure Ship." By John Brandane. Constable. 6s.
- "Five Restoration Tragedies." Edited by Bonamy Dobree. Oxford. 2s.
- "Five One-Act Plays of Village Characters." By Laurence Housman. Deane. Separately. 1s. each.
- "The King of Barvender." By Allan Monkhouse. "The Proof," "George Proposes," and "The Back Way." By James Lansdale Hodson. "Swift and Stella." By C. E. Lawrence. Gowans and Gray. 1s. each.
- "Pilgrim's Progress." Dramatic Version. By Wilton Rix. Allen and Unwin. 2s.

The publication of Mr. Noel Coward's two recent failures together with his banned play, "This Was A Man," makes disturbing reading. I now have a distinct grievance against all the people upon whose advice I stayed away from "Home Chat" and "Sirocco." In print they seem to me often quite as amusing as Mr. Coward's previous work, and considerably more interesting. In his preface the author describes the motive power behind each of these plays as "a distrust of sentimentality amounting almost to hatred," and attributes their failure to this, together with the fact that in these plays his treatment of sex is ironical rather than sentimental, "an attitude of mind which to the average Anglo-Saxon is not only embarrassing but unpardonable." I hardly think this is in itself sufficient explanation of the failure of these two plays in the theatre. Reading them, one detects a certain rawness of emotion, only very perfunctorily concealed. I can quite well imagine myself being a little embarrassed by them in a theatre, not for the reasons which Mr. Coward sets forth, but simply because there are moments when it is too obvious that Mr. Coward is very bitter, and that his bitterness is for the moment not under artistic control. In the theatre the spectacle might be a little embarrassing in the way that any display of uncontrolled emotion is embarrassing. Nevertheless, this is decidedly a book to read, whether or not one has already seen and enjoyed or detested the plays. The few people who fail to enjoy them in print will at least have the consolation of quarrelling violently with the preface.

Mr. Ervine's one-act plays are altogether too sentimental for me. That is not a criticism. It is merely a matter of personal taste. I like only one lump of sugar in my tea, but on that account I have nothing against those people who like five. The thought of it merely makes me feel a little squeamish in the same way that the generous sentimentalism of "Progress" and "She Was No Lady" makes me feel squeamish. "The Magnanimous Lover" is much more to my taste, but

since its production some years ago the theme has been used so often that it has lost most of its point. The best of the four is "Ole George Comes To Tea," a beautifully deft and understanding study of three Cockney characters.

"The Treasure Ship" suffers from a sadly inadequate plot—hardly more than a tame practical joke which has to be spread very thin to "make do" for four acts. Still, the author manages to squeeze some amusing moments from it, and the characterization is so richly and vividly entertaining, without for a moment lapsing into exaggeration or caricature, that one is more than compensated for the skimpiness of the theme. The book also includes two one-act plays. One is the now well-known "Rory Aforesaid," easily the most gorgeously comic of the many versions of "La Farce de Maitre Patelin." The other is "The Happy War," which is hardly up to the author's own standard.

Mr. Bonamy Dobree's selection of Restoration tragedies is well worth having for the sake of his preface even if one already owns all the plays in the volume. Very fittingly, it opens with Dryden's "All for Love," "beyond doubt a proud and lovely masterpiece." I saw it performed some years ago at Oxford in the hall of Merton College, and ever since I have been wondering why it is so neglected by the more intelligent amateur companies. As a play it is streets ahead of "Anthony and Cleopatra," with which it is usually so unfavourably compared, and it is reasonably easy to produce.

Each of Mr. Housman's five plays is technically a beautifully finished piece of work, but I feel that it is only in "A Mint o' Money" that he has a theme which is really worthy of his craftsmanship. This very brief little comedy of character is decidedly a thing to be grateful for. Those who like Mr. Housman in sentimental mood will appreciate "The Snow Man" and "A Likely Story." "The Cal'd and the Chosen" and "The Prize Pigeon" are "kitchen plays," redeemed from conventionality by the perfection of the characterization. All five plays are ideally suited to village companies.

I strongly recommend Mr. Allan Monkhouse's "The King of Barvender" to anybody on the look out for a dramatic one-acter with an original flavour and some opportunity for producing and designing. Mr. Hodson's plays show that he is better at painting a character than constructing a play, but a North country company which could cast the plays to perfection would probably succeed in distracting attention from the weak construction of "The Backway" and "The Proof." I hardly think "George Proposes" is worth bothering about. Mr. Lawrence's dialogue between Swift and Stella had better remain on the printed page. It is good reading but "poor theatre."

Mr. Rix's version of "Pilgrim's Progress" is planned for a church with two side aisles, a centre one, and a chancel, but although it could easily be adapted to a stage, I doubt if it would be effective except in a church, as the whole version is narrative rather than dramatic. Within its limits it is admirably done, but I wonder how Mr. Rix managed to resist the flamingly dramatic opportunities which the book offers.

## SECOND EASTER SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS

OUR Drama League Easter Schools are primarily for producers and stage-managers. But last year quite eighty per cent. of the students were eager to act. Expecting about the same proportion as this year's school on Campden Hill we planned to rehearse plays with large casts and to give the greater part of the time to rehearsals. But the proportion of would-be players had dropped to about ten per cent. A change of programme was inevitable, but could be easily improvised for Mr. Norman Marshall is able to deliver an orderly, clear and telling speech on any branch of his art at very short notice. Students were asked to suggest subjects not covered by other lecturers; an hour each day was taken from rehearsals and devoted to rousing talks on: first principles of stage-setting, lighting and costume; noises off; love scenes; laughter; tears; fights, etc., etc.

In accordance with the original syllabus, Mr. William Simmonds gave a series of "demonstration lectures," with blackboard, models, properties and puppets on the art of production, especially it concerns the village producer. With brown and tinsel paper, paste and string, rags and wire, webbing and sealing-wax, Mr. Simmonds achieves really beautiful properties. His directions for the making and use of portable screens were particularly interesting, because they could be compared with the similar, but by no means identical, notions evolved by Mr. Weston Wells and represented by models in the Exhibition Room.

Both Miss Craig and Mr. Marshall encouraged students to try their hands at producing bits of the play chosen for rehearsal classes and criticized the results. One particular half-minute episode of the entry and grouping of five characters could be done, it was discovered, in fifteen different ways, without traversing the author's directions or misrepresenting the effect he desired.

The most helpful of the lectures by outsiders were Mrs. Wheeler's on the Speaking of the Verse, Miss Constance Smedley's on "Word and Gesture," and Miss Gullan's on "Verse Speaking." Each of

these three ladies has given her whole heart and mind to her special subject and can inspire others with enthusiasm for beautiful speech. We owe special thanks to the London Verse-speaking Choir, who helped Miss Gullan to illustrate her lecture. Mr. Housman's reading of "Possession" was warmly appreciated. Indeed, to watch people "doing" it proved in every case more inspiring than to receive instruction, though much was learned from Mr. Whitworth on the craft of play-writing.

For several years the dramatic work at the Hall School, Weybridge, has been known as one of the most striking examples of what can be done in definitely educational drama, and the Drama League was fortunate in persuading Miss Gilpin to give, at the Arts Theatre Club, and in connexion with the Easter School, two performances of her latest production. "The Lay of Sir Orpheo and Dame Erodys," was invented and produced by the staff and scholars during last term, and the result delighted a packed audience at the matinée, and an almost full house in the evening of Wednesday, April 11.

One was struck by the ingenuity and variety of method displayed throughout the play, which was composed largely of well-known songs and lesser-known excerpts from the mediæval story, knit together by modern but very well-written interludes. There was no attempt to copy ordinary stage methods. The company was content to appear with faces not made up, and the chorus wore costumes reminiscent of the "Gym." But the chief characters were dressed in the mediæval manner, and the simple properties against a curtained or gold background were most effective.

The girls knew exactly what they were doing, and spoke Chaucerian English with a clarity and gusto rarely heard, notably that which showed the luring of Erodys to the nether world.

Sir Michael Sadler spoke in the afternoon, and in the evening Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth and Mr. Richards, Chief Inspector under the Board of Education.

# A NOTE ON LOCAL HISTORY

By Allardyce Nicoll

POSSIBLY the credit for the appearance of these two books\* may justly be claimed by the Drama League; for both spring from that renewed interest in local theatres which has been so deeply fostered by the League during the last decade. Both are labours of love, and take their rise from a keen interest and pride both in past and in present county activities.

The historians of the English theatre have to welcome both, and to hope that others of a similar kind will make their appearance. While London is, and always will be, the centre of our dramatic world, the provinces have their own share in the evolution alike of dramatic art and of theatrical tradition. Many of the particulars concerning local theatres will, of course, be of interest only to country antiquarians, but other facts will possess a larger significance and unless they be gathered together in the various centres and set forth in printed form our knowledge may lack some important pieces of evidence. The plan of each of these two books is fundamentally the same, save that Mr. Burley plunges boldly into the midst of the eighteenth century, while Mr. Sheppard devotes a preliminary thirty pages to mediæval effort. This point of difference leads towards a general reflection, which may be of service to others engaged on similar researches. The reflection is this. Much of value for the study of the mediæval stage may lie buried in local records, and it would be a considerable assistance to the historian of theatrical activity in the Middle Ages to have these local records searched and the relevant portions duly printed. On the other hand, the particular records may yield nothing or be entirely absent, in which case it would be useful to have some assurance on these matters. Mr. Sheppard and Mr. Burley both fail us in this respect. The former gives nothing that is new in his mediæval chapter, while the latter begins his survey only in 1757. Sir Edmund Chambers collected a mass of local material in

\* "Playhouses and Players of East Anglia." By T. L. G. Burley. (Norwich: Jarrold and Sons. 1928.) 5s.

"Evolution of the Drama in Hull and District." By Thomas Sheppard. (Hull: A. Brown and Sons. 1927.)

his "The Mediæval Stage," but much remains yet to be gathered, and we should have felt especially grateful to Mr. Sheppard and to Mr. Burley had they thus carried their researches a trifle further and made their works exhaustive within their own range.

The great danger confronting the local historian is the temptation to become discursive and anecdotal. This danger Mr. Burley rather cleverly avoids, although Mr. Sheppard allows his feet to stray when he gets into the company of good Tate Wilkinson. Each, however, has based his work on the only sure evidence—play-bills; and quite a number of these have been reproduced in both volumes, while a mass of information gained from this source has been summarized in brief form. And here arises another general reflection. The local historians of the future would gain our warmest thanks were they to make a clear distinction between local plays and revived pieces from London. Indeed, I believe that every account of a provincial theatre ought to contain one appendix, presenting a list of all such dramas as seem to have been written specially for it or produced in it for the first time. In this way the local histories would very materially add to the materials at hand for the student of British theatrical activity.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

DEAR SIR,—May one entirely unversed in the technicalities of art advance an opinion on the stage setting for the *Œdipus* of Sophocles, as presented in the March number of *DRAMA*?

Can there be any real justification for invention when we already have in Greek architecture the adequate background for Greek plays? What greater help toward understanding could be found than that offered by the sublime simplicity of the Temple of Theseus at Athens, or that of Neptune at Paestum?—settings which would arouse neither conjecture nor confusion in the mind, a claim which surely cannot be made by Mr. Terence Gray's design, simple though it may be.

The spirit that permeated all Greek art was the same, whatever the medium chosen; do not modern presentations, therefore, call for equal consistency?

One wonders if it is truly artistic to impose on a production a distinct personality, and whether such an act is not alien to the spirit of Greek art.

Yours truly,  
TONEY ROWE

11 Ty-Draw Road, Cardiff





FIRST ACT OF "THE ADVENTURER," BEING  
THE STORY OF MASTER PERKIN WARBECK, BY  
HUGH ROSS. THE SETTING DESIGNED BY  
WALTER SINCLAIR FOR THE PRODUCTION AT  
THE LITTLE THEATRE, NEW ORLEANS



*Photo: Graphic*

PAINTING THE SCENE CLOTH.  
 Reproduced by permission of Mr. C. W. Beaumont,  
 from "The Continental Method of Scene Painting"  
 by Vladimir Polunin.

# "THE CONTINENTAL METHOD OF SCENE PAINTING"

A New Book by M. Polunin, reviewed by P. B. Hembrow

THIS is a book (published by C. W. Beaumont, price 25s. net) which can be recommended to anybody who is in any way interested in the theatre. Vladimir Polunin's explanations of the methods and materials used by Continental artists are clear and well expressed, and his observations on mediums, colours, canvas, fire-proof, etc., should interest all painters for the stage. The story of his experiences in painting for various managements, and for many designers, the trials and difficulties of which are not peculiar to the Continental method, should be read with interest, and, I venture to hope, with advantage, by all designers and producers, as well as scenic artists.

To the two former I would especially recommend a paragraph on page 79, which might well have been printed in letters a foot high:—"Doubts and variations from the original design are always detrimental to the work of the executor, since they impair the freshness of the painting and lead to all manner of disquieting surprises." This is putting it rather mildly.

Another opinion of the author's which I would suggest is worthy of the consideration of producers, is that painted scenery demands that "props" and furniture should be painted in the same medium and manner as that scenery.

I do not agree with M. Polunin that it is impossible to get individuality into painting on a vertical frame, nor that it is impossible to use any technique in that method which is possible in the Continental method. While I agree that "drips" are sometimes a source of anxiety when painting on a frame, I know from experience that it is possible, even when using the thinnest and most flowing colour, to avoid them to a great extent.

In a cloth recently painted a water-colour technique was used, over the thinnest possible priming, with colours which were merely tinted size, but no drips had to be

dealt with, although the cloth was certainly sufficiently thin and "tight" to be folded up and packed for travelling. In this I admit that I had a certain amount of luck, but I would far rather deal with the removal of drips than with the removal of footprints on freshly-painted canvas, which M. Polunin admits do appear at times.

This question of "thin" painting is worthy of more consideration than it receives here, especially when scenery is painted definitely for touring purposes, and the Continental method of packing cloths, which M. Polunin explains might be used by touring companies in England with great advantage to their freight bills, provided that their cloths were sufficiently thin and tight to stand it.

One very real objection to painting on the floor in this country is that, owing to climatic conditions, drying is always likely to be a slow business, and I have found that a cloth takes much longer to dry when it is on the floor (unless the floor happens to be heated, which is not often the case) than when it is on a frame, and so has both sides of the canvas exposed to the air. It occurs to me that this may be the reason underlying the difference in method. I am quite willing to agree that painting on the floor offers some advantages over the frame method, particularly in that, as M. Polunin points out, it is often easier and cheaper to find a room with a large floor, than to find a properly equipped scenic studio with a frame; and if only one could be reasonably sure that paint would dry sufficiently quickly to enable one to walk over it after the lay in had been completed, without loss of time, or fear of footmarks, I think that this method might be more used here.

M. Polunin is an enthusiast, and, like all enthusiasts, has, perhaps, slightly overstated his case for floor painting, and, though he is sure to interest English artists, I do not think that he is more likely to convert them to the floor method, than

## "THE CONTINENTAL METHOD OF SCENE PAINTING"

an English artist would be to convert him to the frame method.

The "get up" of the book is excellent, and the illustrations are admirably reproduced and placed, and it is to be hoped that it will find its way, not only into the hands of painters and designers, but also into the

hands of producers, and that they may "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the paragraph on page 79, which I have quoted, and no longer make drastic alterations to a scene after it has been passed, or, at the least, that they may consult the designer and painter before they do so.

## NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

### PLAYERS OF NORWICH MADDERMARKET

Under the shadow of a church and down a narrow alley, flanked by gravestones,—so we enter a small courtyard. Here is a quaintly irregular barnlike building. A sign shows a peacock perusing a book which lies on a short pedestal. This is the Maddermarket, the theatre of the Norwich Players. By a step we are transported into the Elizabethan age. The spirit of Shakespeare must rest here satisfied.

The theatre is quite small but it will comfortably accommodate an audience of about three hundred. Stout wooden columns support a gallery which runs round three walls. It recalls picturesquely an old innyard. A large glass and metalwork shade of quaint design hangs from the roof. Roomy coffers range round the walls. The apron stage is illuminated entirely from the front. Clever effects are so obtained without the many accessories of the modern theatre. There is no front curtain. The scenery, too, is limited. For instance, the sole scenery for "Coriolanus" was a broad flight of steps, occupying about half the stage, outer and inner curtains, drawn by the actors themselves at the close of each scene, and a small background. Simple but most effective! The performers are but slightly "made up." No names but those of the characters portrayed appear on the programmes. There are no "calls." The acting of the least character, of the mere "walk on" part, is impressive and sincere.

The origin of the Norwich Players is interesting. Mr. Nugent Monck formed a company in 1910. In a small crypt-like building called the Old Musick Room, they performed mediæval mystery and morality plays. Development and rising expenditure made them dependent on larger audiences. So they moved to the Maddermarket.

Many types of plays are now produced. But Shakespeare predominates. Yet among the plays this season are works by Chekhov, Clifford Bax, Ibsen, Shaw and Beatrice Mayor.

The fame of the Norwich Players has now spread abroad. They have received offers to tour both Germany and America. But these have been at present declined for the actors and actresses earn their living during the day by more prosaic means than the histrionic art.

The Arts Theatre Club invited the Players to give a performance in London. They were the first amateurs to be so honoured, and "The Lady from the Sea," by Ibsen, was performed there in March.

The International Society of Decorative Art

awarded a medal for a model of the theatre shown at their Paris Exhibition of 1925. Incidentally, a model, curtains and other theatre designs, have been exhibited recently at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.

It is a great work. One, as the Lord Mayor of Norwich recently pointed out, which brings national and international recognition to the city.

F. C. G.

### COMEDY BY MISS MACNAMARA

Miss Margaret Macnamara's comedy of Saxon times entitled "Yesterday" will be produced by the New Play Club at the Blackfriars Theatre on May 17 and 18. Mr. Granville-Barker bought an option on this play some years ago but he went out of management before he could stage it, and this will be its first public presentation. Miss Macnamara, the organizing director of our Easter school for amateurs, has had several one-act plays produced in London, Manchester and elsewhere, but this is her first full-length play to be presented since the Stage Society performed "The Gates of Morning." Tickets for the performances of "Yesterday" can be obtained from the secretary of the New Play Club, 47 Parkhill Road, N.W.3.

### GRESHAM AMATEUR DRAMATIC SOCIETY

The above society are to be congratulated on their production of "The White-headed Boy," by Lennox Robinson, at the Cripplegate Theatre on Tuesday and Wednesday, March 20 and 21. Every member of the cast displayed a high standard of efficiency. Mr. J. Clifford Turner was the producer and the whole performance ran with ease and briskness.

This Society is also lucky in possessing its own orchestra. The hall was full at the performance on Wednesday, March 21, and the play was received with great enthusiasm. It was altogether a delightful evening.

### THE BOYS' COUNTY SCHOOL, HARROW.

#### "THE SHOEMAKER'S HOLIDAY" BY THOMAS DEKKER.

In many ways this play is an admirable selection for a production by school boys. To begin with it gives us an excellent picture of Elizabethan England—with its gusto and bombasticity, its heroic splendour and its rich coarseness. As a realist (photographically speaking) Dekker is superior to Shakespeare. It is to him, and possibly Heywood, rather than to Shakespeare that we should turn for

## NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

pictures of sixteenth-century England. As a dramatist he is negligible: his love scenes are among the duller and most stilted in the language. This, incidentally, is another point in its favour for school-boy production, since it makes the problem of female impersonation less of a difficulty.

Now the quality of Dekker's work lies in the richness of his dialogue and the colour of his characterization rather than in action or situation; and for this reason presents a considerable difficulty to the inexperienced actor. An actor who wants to get the most out of Dekker (and he did know how to write good acting parts) must have any amount of variety—both of voice and gesture. Unfortunately the producer of the present production was too keen on keeping the pace going (an admirable virtue) to have helped his actors sufficiently in this way. The result was an energetic performance without variety, and tending towards restlessness. The spirit of Dekker was not there except occasionally in some of the earlier scenes in the shoemaker's shop.

Fortunately the scene was saved by Mr. R. Nobbs: this young actor has a nice sense of characterization and good stage personality. We were able to believe in his Simon Eyre and so felt very warmly towards this human little person. Other good performances came from Messrs. Cook (particularly as the Dutchman), Wills (who improved as the play went on), Wood (for his simplicity) and Crafter (spoilt by intolerable restlessness). The scenery was always ingenious and very often pleasing. I particularly liked Eyre's shop. Finally the Dance of the 'Prentices was altogether charming.

ROBERT NEWTON

### THE ISIS PLAYERS

This little band of all-women players gave an interesting evening's programme at the Blackfriars Theatre on April 3 of the three one-act plays performed namely, "Enter the Hero," "The Little Stone House," and "Possession," the second play deserves special praise. Each part was well sustained, there was atmosphere, and the players held their audience.

"Enter the Hero" was very enjoyable, but would have been even better if the heroine had been a little less nervous. The hero was remarkably good and looked most effective.

"Possession" was good up to a point, but the contrast in the character of the three sisters could have been stronger. The "picture" was extremely good.

During the intervals Miss Mable Barnes sang charmingly.

It was a joy to come across an amateur performance which started fairly promptly and did not have long dreary intervals between the plays.

J. R.

### SCIENCE AND THE DRAMA

There was an element of irony in the play recently presented through the "Incogniti," by Mr. J. R. Norman, of the British Museum (Natural History).

The story of "Magnum Opus," as the play is called, is simple and convincing. It was brought before the public at a private production at St. Andrew's Hall, West Kensington. Briefly, Mr.

Norman depicts a young doctor, sympathetically played by Mr. P. J. Norman, who is on the track of a cure for cancer. His whole life has been devoted to research, and though he does not know it, there is a woman, Ruth Heatherley, who is in love, both with him and with his work. Another empty-headed woman comes into his life; she takes him away from his research work, and he doubles his practice. The marriage is a failure, and Ruth Heatherley decides to take the plunge and live with him while divorce proceedings are pending. In the final act Ruth commits suicide because she has been told, as a result of a lightning diagnosis, that she is suffering from cancer.

A happy ending is despised by the dramatist, whether professional or amateur, and Mr. Norman followed suit, but it is wrong to suggest that cancer is an incurable disease, justifying a young woman's suicide. It is surprising, therefore, that such an ending should have been chosen by a man of science, and presented by the "Incogniti" who are all, or most of them, science workers.

The "Incogniti," who will certainly be heard of again, did their best with a play that undoubtedly has promise.

### QUILL CLUB PLAYERS

Three of the four short plays which the Quill Club Players gave at the Cripplegate Institute on Thursday, February 16, were written by members of the company. The other was Pinero's well-known "Playgoers." Perhaps because of a very pronounced nervousness which affected most of the members of the cast the prompter was far too much in evidence. It is difficult therefore (and it might be unfair) to judge of the quality of the plays themselves. We can, however, pay tribute to the undoubted merit of "The Box," a one-act piece by Dorothy Hewlett which was acted really well; Alfred Moore as Tom Weatherby and Daphne Mottram as Jenny Weatherby being particularly good. The other two pieces by members of the Club were comedies, "The Ungovernable Class," by Noel James, and "The Budging of Barney," by Adam H. Murray.

### THE TOLSTOY SOCIETY

I always find it difficult to know what to say about a Dramatic Recital. It seems so very like taking one art form and representing it by a completely different one: in other words, the play instead of being acted is recited. The word recital is, you see, the key to the whole difficulty. This applies more particularly to comedy, and especially to comedy that borders very near to farce. Such was the case with Mrs. Manning-Hicks's recital of Tolstoy's "The Fruits of Enlightenment."

This play is a jest at the expense of spiritualism, and so obviously belongs to "The Private Secretary" period. It would, however, probably act extremely well since it is full of life, bustle, and action. We have unfortunately seen too many of Tchekov's plays to appreciate Tolstoy's less subtle satire on the leisured aristocracy of pre-revolution Russia. Mrs. Manning-Hicks achieved something of a *tour de force*; for although never re-creating an atmosphere—as Ruth Draper might have done—she managed to hold the interest of the audience the whole time.

ROBERT NEWTON



## NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

### THE FIELDFLOWER PLAYERS

#### "THE PILGRIM'S QUEST"

Those who were fortunate enough to be present at St. Stephen's Hall on March 20 spent a satisfying evening. The Fieldflower Players presented "The Pilgrim's Quest," by H. L. Hawkridge, B.Sc., and kept their audience attentive for nearly two-and-a-half hours. This, without help of scenery or stage lighting. "The Pilgrim's Quest" is a series of scenes in many lands, where a youthful pilgrim and his old cobbler companion travel in search of the true religion. From the terrified Jungle Devil Worshipper, the Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu, Muhammadan, and finally, the Christian Indians, these travellers find some truth, but only in the teaching of Christ is to be found the pity and love of erring humanity.

The Fieldflower Players gave an excellent performance. The whole cast was good and the production a memorable one.

N. M.

### THE ABINGER AND WOTTON VILLAGE PLAYERS IN "PRUNELLA"

After a lapse of several years, this Society initiated its rebirth recently with an entirely successful performance of Laurence Housman and Granville-Barker's delightful fantasy.

Miss Peggy Calthrop, of the Festival Theatre, Cambridge, who originally founded the Society, returned to produce the play, and to play Prunella with that wistful charm that is entirely her own, and the company was further strengthened by Mr. Walter Meyjes, also of the Festival Theatre, who gave a brilliant performance as Scaramel, the very exacting part of Pierrot being played exceedingly well by Mr. Tom Harrison.

Uncertain weather prevented the carrying out of the original intention of producing the play as a pastoral, and the performance was therefore given in an old converted tithe barn in the grounds of Wotton House, the home of John Evelyn, the famous diarist.

Although hampered by the smallness of the stage, Miss Calthrop had produced the play with an exquisite sureness of touch, the whole production being absolutely in key, helped not a little by a very attractive setting by Mr. Arthur Wood, who had made masterly use of the very limited space, and admirable lighting effects.

### BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE ANNUAL MEETING

The ninth annual meeting will be held in London on the afternoon of Friday, June 29, for the election of officers, council and other business. Nominations and items for the agenda should be in the hon. secretary's hands not later than June 1.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Mr. Purdom's "Notes on Play-Choosing"

DEAR SIR,—I have read with great interest Mr. C. B. Purdom's "Notes on Play-Choosing" in the March and April numbers of DRAMA, though I am depressed to find that his conclusions are nearly always directly opposed to those drawn from my own experience. For instance, in his classification of plays according to their difficulty, he adopts the following order, putting the hardest first:—1 Comedy, 2 Tragedy, 3 Romantic plays, 4 Farce, 5 Naturalistic plays. I do not know if anyone will agree with me, but personally I should arrange them as follows:—1 Farce (the hardest), 2 Romantic plays, 3 Naturalistic plays, 4 Tragedy, 5 Comedy (the easiest).

I have put farce first because the pace at which it has to be played makes it exceedingly hard for amateurs, and if it drags the production is entirely spoilt. Romantic plays are difficult because they are remote from real life. A special atmosphere has to be created, and if this is not done the play is lifeless and unconvincing. Naturalistic plays, i.e., homely plays dealing with commonplace people, are not easy to do well, and unless they are very well done they are dull and boring. Tragedy, however, if rightly played, appeals to the sympathy of the spectators, and predisposes them in its favour, while the light, amusing dialogue in comedy puts them in a good humour from the start, and helps them to enter into the spirit of the piece.

In the same article Mr. Purdom says, "one-act plays are easier to do than full-length plays. Three or four one-act plays require much less effort than one three- or four-act play." Here, again, my experience has been the reverse. Much, of course, depends on the size of the Dramatic Society. When several people are available as stage-managers it is no doubt easier to produce four short plays than one long one, but, in a society where the membership is small, it often happens that the same stage-manager has to undertake the production of the three or four plays, and that the same actors have to take part in at least two of them. This obviously gives more work to the producer. From the actor's point of view, too, it is easier to take a fairly long part in a three-act play than two short parts in different plays. When considering a triple or quadruple bill one has also to remember the greater difficulty in getting a short play across. The performers, having a relatively short time at their disposal, have to grip the audience from the beginning or they are fore-doomed to failure. In a long play, even if there is a certain "wooden-ness" at first, the players have a chance to make good before the curtain falls at the end of the last act.

Yours faithfully,

S. FREDA PAYNTER.

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